Security Quickie 11-8-02: Life's Early Lessons

In our nation, information security touches on almost everyone's life. Anyone who uses computers at work, the library, or at home, anyone who uses credit cards, has a credit history, uses online applications, or has personal information in a government or business database needs to be aware of information security issues. Eventually information security will touch everyone who is born, goes to school, gets a medical exam, gets licensed, etc., and dies. The only people who don't need to worry about it fall within that last category; all others would be wise to at least learn how to protect themselves in our increasingly information-dependent world.

Did you learn how to write letters and mail envelopes in elementary school? Now we need to know proper e-mail etiquette as well. Did you lock up your bike when you left it at school or in the mall parking lot? We need to lock our workstations when we leave them, too. Did you learn you needed to wash your hands and brush your teeth (and floss!) to stay healthy? We have firewalls, anti-virus software, and online 'best practices' to use to keep our workstations and networks safe, too. Did you learn to not write down your locker combination so the class bully wouldn't steal it, open your locker, and dump your stuff all over the hallway? Now we create strong passwords and protect them in order to protect our systems and data.

It seems most of us already learned many of the basic tenets of information security when we were kids – we just have to apply the lessons we learned then to the systems we use today. Be nice, protect your stuff, and try to stay clean. Gee, Mom was right after all…

To get a neat view of information security issues from a different perspective, I invite you to take a look at a security awareness video created by the University of Virginia, at http://www.itc.virginia.edu/pubs/docs/RespComp/videos/. It's really wonderful – it's short, hilarious, chilling, and educational all at the same time. And it really does give insight into security issues that we, and those who come after us, need to be aware of both today and in the future.

"When I Go to UVA…" http://www.itc.virginia.edu/pubs/docs/RespComp/videos/